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ABSTRACT

The increasingly diverse ethnic composition of the nation's children poses new opportunities, but also serious challenges, to the nation's education institutions, including the early childhood programs that lay the foundation for children's school experience and achievement. In light of the controversy on this subject, its significance for educational policy, and the complexity and changing dimensions of the issues that lie at the interface of early education and cultural diversity, a workshop (Culture and Early Education: Assessing and Applying the Knowledge Base) was organized in November 1993 to examine the small but growing research literature that bears on the early education of culturally and linguistically diverse populations of children. This report on the workshop is divided into five sections. The first section explains the origin and purpose of the workshop. The second through fourth sections offer discussion of the topics that provided the structure for the workshop. Those topics are: (1) the role culture plays in shaping children's earliest learning opportunities and experiences at home; (2) how children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect the skills, knowledge, and expectations that children bring to school; and (3) what is known about whether and how the nature, language, or content of instruction needs to vary to assure motivation and learning for children from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The final section highlights directions for future research on cultural diversity in early education. Contains over 70 references. (TJQ)

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# Cultural Diversity and Early Education

## Report of a Workshop

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# Cultural Diversity and Early Education

## Report of a Workshop

Deborah Phillips and Nancy A. Crowell, Editors

Board on Children and Families

Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education
National Research Council

Institute of Medicine

National Academy Press
Washington, D.C. 1994

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The success of the Forum and its many activities led the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine in May 1993 to establish the Board on Children and Families. Eugene Garcia, Deborah Stipek, Kenji Hakuta, and Diane August played instrumental roles in shepherding the work on culture and education through the transition from the Forum to the

Board. Deborah Stipek, member of the Board, was a masterful chair of the Workshop on Culture and Early Education: Assessing and Applying the Knowledge Base, held at the Beckman Center on November 29-30, 1993. This report is based largely on that workshop. Many other individuals, including Ron Mincy, Jerome Kagan, Ann Brown, Anne Marie Palincsar, Jim Stigler, and Ron Gallimore, made very helpful contributions to various stages of the work of the Forum and Board in this area. Laura Klenk and Andrea DeBruin Parecki, graduate students at the University of Michigan, prepared a background paper, "Preschool Development in Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse Populations: A Review of the Literature," that provided extremely valuable input to the November 1993 workshop and to this report.

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# 1

# Cultural Contexts for Learning

Not since the 1930s has the ethnic composition of the nation's children been so diverse. Nonwhites now account for almost one-third of the U.S. population of children and youths (to age 18), with recent growth accounted for almost exclusively by Latinos and Asians—two groups that are themselves extremely diverse. Estimates of the number of students in U.S. schools with limited English proficiency range from 2.3 million (U.S. Department of Education, 1992) to much higher (Stanford Working Group, 1993). The current influx of new immigrant groups, some of whom also have relatively high rates of birth, will fuel continued growth in the number of students who enter school with little or no English proficiency and whose cultural and educational backgrounds may not correspond to the norms and expectations they encounter when they start formal schooling.

## THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

These trends pose new opportunities, but also serious challenges, to U.S. educational institutions, including the early childhood programs that lay the foundation for children's school experience and achievement. In California, for example, a recent study of more than 400 child care centers revealed that only 4 percent enrolled children from a single racial group (Chang, 1993). Nationwide, estimates suggest that 20 percent of the children enrolled in Head Start speak a language other than English (Kagan and Garcia, 1991).

Many of these children adapt successfully to school environments. In spite of unusually difficult circumstances, such as those frequently experienced by refugee children, some even exceed the academic norms of U.S.-born native speakers from advantaged environments (Laosa, 1990). But many others fare less well. On entering elementary school, large numbers of limited-English-proficient and bilingual students are placed in programs that assume relatively low levels of achievement and focus on remedial education (Independent Commission on Chapter 1, 1992; Stanford Working Group, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

This occurs despite the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) upholding requirements that schools open their instructional programs to students with limited English proficiency. Latino children, in particular, often begin school behind their white, non-Latino peers, and the variance widens as children go through school. Latino dropout rates, though declining, remain extremely high: in 1990 only 54.5 percent of 18- to 24-year- olds had a diploma or GED (General Equivalency Diploma) (Carter and Wilson, 1991). These inequities in different children's prospects for school success are a serious affront to the value that Americans place on equal opportunity and a grave problem for the future well-being of the society, which relies on an informed citizenry, a productive workforce, and the harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures.

From another perspective, teachers are confronted with classrooms of children they feel ill-prepared to teach. And parents whose backgrounds may leave them poorly equipped to feel confident as advocates for their children's schooling worry about how their children are faring in school, whether they are learning what they need to learn, and whether their adaptation into the classroom will alienate them from their home communities.

Yet little is understood about the derivation of this complex of concerns. Is it primarily different language, different culture, or different social class that determines which groups of children succeed or fail in the educational system? It is primarily an issue of difference—that a teacher faces a classroom of Russian immigrants? Or is it a problem of diversity—that many classrooms include children with multiple nationalities, languages, and social and economic backgrounds? Absent a clear understanding of the problem that is posed by the growing diversity of the nation's children, and of *who* perceives these demographic changes as a problem, efforts to identify appropriate adjustments in teacher training, classroom practices, schools' relations with parents, assessments, and other dimensions of schooling are likely to remain fragmented, if not ineffectual.

Today, efforts to define and address these issues are coinciding with growing pressures to raise performance standards for the nation's schools and to assess all students' progress towards meeting those standards. In 1990, the President and the 50 state governors recognized the importance of



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the preschool years for the success of school reform initiatives when they set the first of six national educational goals: "By the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn." Efforts to assure that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are prepared for school entry have, as a result, gained prominence during the past few years. For example:

- The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association for Family Day Care have published curricula and handbooks focused on anti-bias curricula (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989; National Association for Family Day Care, 1990).
- The National Association of State Boards of Education Task Force on Early Childhood Education has explicitly recommended that state boards of education encourage the use of children's home language and culture to foster the development of basic skills, including English acquisition (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988).
- "Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs" (Head Start Bureau, 1991) reflects the culmination of a multiyear project aimed at improving Head Start's capacity to teach its increasingly diverse enrollment.
- Specific attention is being focused on the implications of the first national educational goal of school readiness for language minority children (see Prince and Lawrence, 1993).

All these efforts seek to ensure that children's first exposure to a "school-like" setting is a positive one. Whether this experience makes a child feel accepted or alienated is believed to set the stage for subsequent attitudes about and performance in school. The prevailing orientation within the early childhood community assumes that children whose language or cultural backgrounds differ from those found in most American schools will feel accepted only to the degree that their classroom experiences are adapted to be more compatible with their home culture and language. Others, however, believe that instructional programs must use universal principles of learning and instruction for all students. Fundamental questions are raised by this debate regarding appropriate and effective educational practices in a pluralistic society.

## ORIGINS AND PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

In light of the controversy about this subject, its significance for educational policy, and the complexity and changing dimensions of the issues that lie at the interface of early education and cultural diversity, the Forum on the Future of Children and Families and its successor, the Board on

Children and Families, believed it was important to take stock of the small, but growing research literature that bears on the early education of culturally and linguistically diverse populations of children. Scholars of language and cognitive development are contributing to increased knowledge about the conditions that affect first- and second-language acquisition. Others who study early childhood education, bilingualism, and cross-cultural influences on development are learning about the influence of children's home environments on the expectations and skills with which they approach school, and about effective instructional practices for bilingual, immigrant, and other children who may face special challenges in the classroom. Much of this literature remains focused on elementary-age and older students, although its implications for preschool and kindergarten instruction are receiving increased attention.

The forum held a preliminary planning workshop in April 1993 to outline the most important tasks that could be accomplished on the topic of cultural diversity and early education. The participants highlighted the need to assess the scope and adequacy of the research base about the early education of culturally diverse populations of children and stressed the importance of deciphering its implications for educational policy and practice. This emphasis grew out of the participants' perceptions that much of what is presently known from both research and educational practice is based on the demographics of the past, in which most classrooms were at least linguistically, if not ethnically, homogeneous, and in which the backgrounds of teachers and students did not usually differ. If true, it is critical to initiate a discourse regarding what we know and don't know about preparing educators and educational institutions for the demographics of the present and future.

On the basis of the planning workshop, the Board on Children and Families convened a workshop, "Culture and Early Education: Assessing and Applying the Knowledge Base," on November 29-30, 1993. The workshop had two primary aims: to inform educators about the research base that is available to guide decisions about how best to educate children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and, in particular, to distinguish whether and how one might expect optimal early childhood education for diverse classrooms to differ from that for culturally homogeneous classrooms; and to urge more scholars, including those who conduct basic research on early learning processes, to address the vast agenda of unanswered questions regarding the early education of culturally and linguistically diverse groups of children.

The participants were selected to span the range of perspectives that presently exists regarding the most critical dimensions of diversity—linguistic, cultural, or class-linked, for example—in order to foster a wide-ranging discussion about "what matters" about diversity for early childhood

settings. They had expertise in learning and instructional psychology, developmental psychology, early education, anthropology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and program evaluation. The samples they studied included African American, Native American, Caribbean, Portuguese, Anglo, and Latino children from Central America, Mexico, and Puerto Rico; children from first-, second-, and third-generation immigrant families; and children living in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, and other countries. Virtually every participant had spent substantial amounts of time in early childhood classrooms that serve diverse groups of children and many had worked directly with the families of the children they studied.

In preparation for the workshop, the participants were asked to prepare a set of remarks aimed at familiarizing each other with key aspects of their work, specifically to:

- discuss the theoretical assumptions that have guided their work,
- describe the primary questions that their research has addressed and the methods and samples they have used, and
- summarize their most important findings.

The participants were also asked to provide background papers describing their research, and these materials, many of which are cited in this report, enabled us to expand on the discussion that occurred at the workshop. In addition to the participants' presentations and background papers and the workshop discussions, this report draws on a commissioned review paper by Klenk and Parecki (1993).

## THE ROLE AND MEANING OF CULTURE

The role of culture in learning and development has been a prevailing theme in developmental research for more than 50 years. Much of the earliest work was designed to test the assumption that human development, particularly cognitive and sensorimotor development, occurs in a universal, sequential fashion. Counter-evidence was often interpreted as demonstrating a deficiency within the culture, rather than as deriving from the investigator's failure to use tasks and methods that were relevant to the cultural groups being studied. As the field began to make culturally appropriate adjustments in methodology, the diversity of paths by which children achieve developmental milestones was revealed (Cole, 1992, Cole and Bruner, 1971).

During the 1960s and 1970s, efforts to understand the influence of culture on human development expanded from cross-cultural research on other continents to examinations of cultural variation within the United States. Early examples of this research tended to compare various ethnic

groups to members of the dominant culture, often confounding race and social class and typically ignoring important within-group variation (see, e.g., critiques by Coll, 1990; McLoyd, 1990). This approach led to stereotyping and interpretations of findings that promoted notions of cultural deficits (Bloom, Davis, and Hess, 1965; Jensen, 1981). Children from low-income African American families, in particular, were portrayed as being culturally deprived by their families' failure to provide appropriate stimulation and adequate preparation for school. Opponents of deficit reasoning asserted that minority students do poorly in school not because their home environments are inferior, but because their strengths are not recognized or used in school settings (Ogbu, 1978; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Tharp, 1989). This position is referred to as the cultural conflict model.

Workshop participants criticized both the cultural deficit and cultural conflict models as promoting cultural stereotyping and contributing to unconstructive efforts to "find fault" with children's home or school settings as the source of minority and low-income students' lower achievement. They also rejected models of research that treat culture as a category for classifying and comparing individuals as one might treat, for example, nationality. Not only does this approach foster undesirable uses of research, but it also camouflages the substantial variation that characterizes every cultural group. As noted by Gallimore and Goldenberg (1993: 331): "Variance within groups means that "culture" cannot be controlled for or measured as a trait."

Turning to their own definitions of culture, the participants agreed on two points. First, culture is a ubiquitous context for socialization within which children are taught that particular acts have particular meanings and that certain behaviors are appropriate while others are not. Second, culture has a profound effect on the way in which people's shared understandings about what youngsters need to learn and how best to teach them are enacted in children's day-to-day lives.

The participants diverged, however, in how they had operationalized "culture" in their own research. Some had focused primarily on economic or educational differences among their subjects. Others had distinguished children primarily in terms of their home language. Still others had been most interested in the immigrant status or ethnic backgrounds of the children. It is not uncommon for several of these dimensions of culture to have been confounded in this research, particularly those of class and minority group status. As a result, the workshop discussion periodically turned to speculation about what, other than social class, is significant about the increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds of the young children who are now entering early childhood classrooms.

Recognizing the shortcomings of treating culture as a categorical vari-

able that has uniform effects on all families and children, the participants emphasized the importance of examining within-culture and individual differences in learning experiences and outcomes. Claude Goldenberg cautioned against treating culture as a "straitjacket that predetermines the learning experiences that children can benefit from." The participants were uniformly concerned that the use of culture as a organizing construct not be interpreted as a prescription for treating particular children (e.g., Haitians, Zuni, Vietnamese) in certain limited ways.

Generational, regional, socioeconomic, and gender differences within ethnic groups were specifically discussed. Kenji Hakuta, for example, noted that native language loss among Mexican American children increases across first-, second-, and third-generation children (Hakuta and D'Andrea, 1992). Luis Laosa discussed the wide variation associated with social class within ethnic and immigrant populations. His own research with Chicano families, for example, revealed significant differences in the teaching strategies used by high school graduates and nongraduates with their 5-year-old children (Laosa, 1978). With respect to immigrant families, he highlighted the need to consider the range of social and economic backgrounds that may characterize families from the same country or ethnic group (Laosa, 1990).

Some participants speculated that members of different cultural groups may have more shared than different values, including high aspirations for their children's school success, a clear recognition of the importance of educational achievement for their children's social and economic mobility, and a strong emphasis on the importance of hard work (see, e.g., Goldenberg, 1987). Others emphasized that local conditions under which different cultural groups are living will lead adult caregivers to emphasize different goals and aspirations (see, e.g., Levine, 1977). In situations in which a child's health is fragile or neighborhood violence threatens children's safety, keeping children confined and away from danger will likely be much higher on the list than promoting cognitive development.

Overall, the participants agreed that it is important to acknowledge variation in the extent to which home environments provide children with the materials and experiences that are broadly considered desirable for success in U.S. schools. They subscribed to the premise that children's adaptation to the norms and expectations of school environments can be affected by the culturally determined experiences to which they have been exposed at home. The important issue, as noted by Deborah Stipek, concerns "how these two contexts in which children learn can reinforce and complement each other."

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN AND LEARNING

In addition to clarifying their views on the role and meaning of culture, the participants explored their shared views and assumptions about children and early learning:

- Children from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds are capable of achieving high standards and should be encouraged and taught to do so. Individual differences in English language proficiency or in cultural background should not affect a child's exposure to high-quality instruction, challenging curricula, and high expectations for academic success. Given that educational attainment is a cumulative process, practices and expectations that impede a child's progress during the preschool and early elementary years may be particularly detrimental.
- The contribution of children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds to their adjustment and success in school cannot be understood separately from the sociopolitical context within which discussions about culture and education are occurring in the United States. Despite the valued role of schools as an avenue for equal opportunity in this country, debates about whether and how schools should respond to the growing diversity of the school-age population often become mired in such controversial issues as immigration policy, access of immigrants to social and educational services, and U.S. language policy regarding the official status of English. This politically charged context underscores the critical importance of having a solid knowledge base with which to inform policy and practice.
- Academic success involves knowledge and skill acquisition, as well as motivational and social dimensions of learning. Although academic learning is a primary goal of education and the focus of educational reform efforts, ideas about how best to achieve this goal need to be broadened to include children's participation in learning, their self-confidence as students, and their capacity to work effectively with other children and with adults.
- All children can benefit from exposure to multilingual and multicultural learning environments. The growing linguistic and cultural diversity of the student population is often viewed as problematic, as an additional pressure placed on an already beleaguered school system. But, diversity is not inherently problematic. Early education settings can and should be designed to approach diversity as an asset that can be used in the preparation of all students for citizenship in an increasingly diverse society.

## THE REPORT

This report reflects the participants' views on the most important issues that require better knowledge if early childhood classrooms are to offer children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds effective

and meaningful learning experiences. It draws on their analysis, experience, and knowledge of the research on these issues. The goal was not to achieve unanimity of opinion, but rather to distinguish questions for which there is research evidence from those that are based primarily on values or ideology. The participants also began the process of deciphering the practical implications of the existing research and identifying promising directions for future research.

Several caveats about the scope of the report are in order. First, although much of what was discussed could be construed as having implications for policies regarding parent education, the focus of the workshop was limited to implications for group care and educational settings, including the ways in which those implications may affect parents. Second, substantial thought was given to culturally shaped aspects of children's home environments that hold meaning for early childhood settings. Variation in cultural aspects of schooling, while recognized as important by the participants, was not a focus of discussion. Finally, the extremely timely and controversial issue of assessment, particularly as a basis for placement at the end of early childhood in bilingual or mainstream classes, or in regular or special education classes, was not discussed: the complexity of the topic warranted more time than the workshop permitted.

The next three sections of the report are organized around the three questions that provided the structure for the workshop:

- What roles does culture play in shaping children's earliest learning opportunities and experiences at home?
- How do children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect the skills, knowledge, and expectations that they bring to school?
- What do we know about whether and how the nature, language, or content of instruction needs to vary to assure learning and motivation for children from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds?

Many interesting and important questions that call for serious study were raised throughout the discussions. Several of them are noted in the final section that addresses future directions for research.

Readers familiar with this field of study will appreciate the caution with which the participants approached the existing research literature. People in the early childhood community seeking clear advice about educational practices are likely to be frustrated by the limited degree to which preschool children or preschool settings have been studied in terms of questions of culture and schooling. As reflected in this report, the workshop participants believe it is critical to identify the limits of what is presently known, as well as the potential of research in progress, to advance this field substantially.

# 2

# Cultural Diversity at Home

It has long been recognized that cultural variables influence how children present themselves, understand the world, and interpret experiences. Culture also affects the experiences through which children's earliest literacy and number knowledge are acquired. Some of these experiences may be explicitly focused on encouraging learning, such as reading books to children or instructing them to count. More common are activities that provide implicit, unintentional support for various types of learning in the context of shared everyday activities, such as measuring ingredients when baking cookies or counting change at the grocery store. Significant, as well, are the adult activities that children witness and interpret as enjoyable or useful *because* their parents and relatives engage in them, such as reading for enjoyment or telling stories.

As the preschool and school-age populations have become increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse, interest in understanding the role that variation in children's home-based learning opportunities plays in fostering readiness for school has also increased. Research on early literacy acquisition has revealed the ample repertoire of literacy learning that occurs long before formal instruction is introduced in elementary school (Chall, 1983; Heath, 1983; Teale, 1986; Snow, 1983; Teale and Sulzby, 1986). Similar evidence has emerged regarding the importance of early experiences for numerical knowledge (Griffin, Case, and Sandieson, 1992; Hiebert, 1986; Siegler and Robinson, 1982). Across every academic domain, these experiences are deeply embedded in the culture of the family and the community:

they occur less as isolated lessons in reading or counting, for example, than in the context of on-going activities of family life.

This research strongly suggests that efforts to create effective classroom environments for young children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be based, in part, on knowledge about the role that culture plays in shaping children's learning opportunities and experiences at home. From teachers' standpoints, it is critical to identify those aspects of children's cultural backgrounds that have the greatest relevance for children's adjustment, motivation, and learning at school.

The workshop participants suggested many possibilities as important factors. They fell into three categories: (1) parents' attitudes and beliefs about early learning, (2) the nature and extent of parent-child interactions and other experiences that support the kinds of learning that schools tend to expect from children, and (3) social conventions that affect the ways in which knowledge and skills pertinent to early learning are communicated among and used by family members. (The primary language used at home is, without question, also a profoundly important factor that affects children's adjustment to school; the workshop discussions that addressed this topic are summarized in the next chapter.)

## PARENTAL BELIEFS

The nature of literacy and numeracy interactions in the home are a direct reflection of parents' views about how children learn to read, write, use numbers, and acquire other competencies. Parents hold implicit theories of learning that affect whether and how they attempt to influence the literacy and learning of their children before they enter formal schooling (Stipek, Milburn, Galluzzo, and Daniels, 1992). These beliefs about what parents should do and what teachers should do manifest themselves in behavior at home and in parents' relations with their children's teachers (Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore, 1992).

Tim Shanahan, for example, reported that his sample of low-income Latino mothers from the Chicago area believed that efforts to encourage young children to read or write before they enter school are inappropriate and may actually interfere with school learning. Books are often considered treasured possessions and deliberately kept out of the reach of young children. These parents, it was noted, do not appear to perceive that their children's attempts to scribble or talk as they leaf through books have significance for literacy development and so do not elaborate on these occurrences as a teaching opportunity.

Claude Goldenberg described a home literacy intervention with low-income families from Mexico and Central America, in which he and his colleagues introduced simple but meaningful books (*libritos*) into the homes

of kindergarten students. The books served to increase parents' use of positive feedback and questioning about letter and word recognition during reading, but parents did not increase their attempts to encourage their children to find meaning in the text or to pretend-read as an enjoyable activity. These parents treated the books in accordance with their views of how children learn to read, namely, through the repetitious and accurate practice of letters, syllables, and words. To expect them to do more would have involved changing their beliefs about their role, about how they view learning, and about the purpose for which they engaged in the task (Gallimore and Goldenberg, 1993).

A general theme of this discussion distinguished the value that parents place on learning and school achievement from how they express this value. The workshop participants, as a group, had studied families from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. They all stressed that the parents they had studied firmly believe in the importance of education and its instrumental role in facilitating their children's economic well-being; the parents also had high aspirations for their children's school achievement. None had observed the disaffection and devaluing of education that has been documented in the literature on adolescents (Matuti-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu, 1982, 1993; Ogbu and Matuti-Bianchi, 1986).

Knowing that parents have theories of learning that are not necessarily consistent with the prevailing research knowledge about prereading or premath development or with the theories held by their children's teachers raises the question of what to do: Should parents be trained in the knowledge base that presently guides early educational practice? Should schools adopt educational practices that accommodate parents' understandings? Or some combination of the two? These are among the thorny issues raised by the research on parents' beliefs.

## HOME EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT LEARNING

Research has contributed substantially to identifying the beneficial experiences that parents provide at home to facilitate their children's achievement in U.S. classrooms. This research encompasses the explicit provision of instructional materials and activities, inadvertent teaching that occurs in the context of everyday activities, and children's observational learning from the activities of older siblings and adults. However, this is primarily a correlational literature: It has not demonstrated cause-effect relationships, but, rather, associations between certain features of home environments and children's early learning in the U.S. context.

Children benefit from environments that have high amounts of rich discourse and print-related experiences. Exposure to meaningful, age-appropriate reading experiences that children can both observe and engage in

is related to literacy development (Beals, deTemple, and Dickinson, 1994; Gallimore and Goldenberg, 1993). Rather than simply reading the printed words in a child's book, for example, parents foster early literacy by engaging the child in conversations about the text and encouraging the child's attempts to pretend to read and write. Literacy development is also encouraged when children are asked for information with open-ended questions that challenge them to use reasoning skills rather than simply to find the "right" answer. It is not the simple presence or absence of a particular activity, such as storybook reading, that most affects children's early learning. Rather, it is the language and social interaction that surround such activities that are associated with the early acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills.

David Dickinson described his work with Catherine Snow on the environmental supports at home and in preschool that enable children from low-income backgrounds to acquire literacy skills (Dickinson and Beals, 1994; Snow and Dickinson, 1991). Snow has focused on features of home settings in which the types of discussions that facilitate language development are most likely to occur. In some communities, mealtimes appear to offer an especially rich setting within which children develop literacy-related language skill. It is during these conversations that children hear varied vocabulary, are encouraged to answer questions and to speculate about past and future events, and to practice their narrative skills. Children who experienced a higher proportion of this variety of mealtime talk at 4 years of age showed more advanced language development at age 5 than did children whose mealtime conversations were more linguistically limited (Dickinson and Beals, 1994). Conversations among family members afford children the opportunity to improve their vocabulary, to gain experience with explanatory talk, and to practice telling stories.

Sharon Griffin reported on home activities that predict children's early sense of numbers. Beneficial activities include board games and card games that involve numbers, as well as the engagement of children in conversations about numbers in the context of other activities, such as shopping, sorting laundry, or picking up toys. Children with ample exposure to these experiences were found to enter kindergarten with more intuitive knowledge of numbers than did their classmates from families in which these opportunities were notably rare (Case and Griffin, 1990; Griffin, Case, and Capodilupo, in press).

To what extent are these home experiences available to young children? What are the major sources of variation in children's exposure to the social, intellectual, and material resources that are directly related to the norms and expectations of schools? The workshop participants were in agreement on several points. First, social class and level of parents' education, as distinct from ethnicity and nationality, appear to be the more potent determinants of

children's home learning experiences. For example, in the children studied by Sharon Griffin and her colleagues—which included Portuguese immigrants in Toronto, Caribbean immigrants in Massachusetts, African Americans in California, and white Canadians and Americans in major cities—social class, rather than ethnic group, differentiated the children who had more or less exposure to the premath experiences that she found to be so important. Luis Laosa also emphasized the role of social class. He commented that school, itself, is a culture. Parents who have acquired high levels of education and have thus had ample exposure to the values, expectations, and activities of the school culture are generally better equipped to prepare their own children for school. Indeed, an extensive literature that encompasses African American, Mexican American, and Anglo families has revealed that parents who vary in their educational levels also vary in the extent to which they engage in precisely those experiences that are most closely associated with children's early and sustained literacy growth (Chall, 1983; Feagans and Farran, 1982; Heath, 1983; Laosa, 1978, 1980).

Second, children in low-income homes were exposed to a range of literacy materials and activities, such as letter-writing and informational uses of print material (e.g., newspapers, telephone books, menus), but reading material was not very plentiful and usually consisted of newspapers and adult books; children's books were much more sparse. In one study, for example, 40 percent of low-income Latino homes reported having no children's books (Goldenberg, 1989).

As discussed below ("What Children Bring to School"), the relatively limited home literacy experiences of low-income children are reflected in their limited literacy knowledge and skills when they begin kindergarten (see Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore, 1992). Goldenberg, for example, reported that 60 to 70 percent of the low-income Latino children he studied could not name or recognize any letters at kindergarten entry.

The workshop participants noted that further reiteration of these associations comes perilously close to the deficit orientation that has plagued the literature on social-class differences in home learning environments. Yet to ignore these findings is also problematic in the context of U.S. schools that often take certain experiences and intuitive knowledge for granted, fail to teach it, and therefore leave some children behind from the moment they begin formal instruction. With these tensions in mind, the participants agreed that efforts to improve low-income children's success in school must attend to the differential learning opportunities that exist between home and school for many low-income children, many of whom are also from non-Anglo or immigrant backgrounds.

## SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

A growing literature is documenting ways in which children from different cultural backgrounds are exposed to different conversational rules, conventions for displaying respect, and other patterns of social interaction that may have significant effects on the ease and comfort with which they make the transition to school. Several examples from this literature were discussed at the workshop.

Conversational rules and discourse patterns appear to vary widely across cultures. Barbara Rogoff discussed how different cultural groups are comfortable with differing amounts of conversation and, accordingly, with silence. In some cultures, individuals who talk a lot are considered smart; in others, they are considered foolish. This affects how much children will talk and how comfortable they are likely to be with demands to talk more or less. In some cultures, children are treated by adults as conversational partners; in others, children adopt the role of observer, and information is communicated primarily through shared activity rather than in the context of lessons or explanations (Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, and Mosier 1993). The role and place of interruptions also vary across cultures. In some, frequent interruptions are expected as part of active engagement in a conversation. In others, long pauses between comments and between questions and answers are more the norm.

Questioning behavior appears to be heavily imbued with cultural meaning. Patricia Greenfield discussed her work comparing the amount and meaning of questioning behavior by Japanese and U.S. students (Greenfield and Cocking, 1994). Japanese students were reluctant to ask questions because this behavior has negative connotations. It suggests that the student did not work hard enough to understand the material or that s/he is implicitly criticizing the teacher's ability to communicate information. In contrast, U.S. students asked many questions, presumably because they value this behavior as a means of demonstrating involvement and interest.

Conversational rules also express patterns of respect and authority that, in turn, vary across cultures. In some cultures, because age is the major determinant of patterns of respect, children are hesitant to question their teachers or to act as their conversational partners. Most U.S. classrooms, in contrast, tend to value children's willingness to engage in verbal exchanges with their teachers and classmates. Lisa Delpit's work (1988) has revealed the intricate association between some African American children's respect for their teachers and the degree of authority that the teachers express in their classroom interactions. This authority is often communicated through highly directive and didactic methods that have been portrayed as inappropriate by white, middle-class standards. Low-income Chicano families, as well, have been observed to rely on highly directive socializing and teach-

ing tactics (Laosa, 1978). Work with Native American students, in contrast, has revealed children's belief that they should be responsible for their own learning. Highly directive teachers appear to undermine these beliefs and, in so doing, undermine their own authority in the eyes of these relatively autonomous children.

## SUMMARY

Culture plays a complex and ubiquitous role in shaping children's earliest learning opportunities and experiences in the home. Parent's beliefs about when and how children learn school-related skills, their daily interactions with their children, and the social rules that guide these interactions combine in intricate ways to create what Luis Moll has termed "funds of knowledge" that are based in culture (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992). However, efforts to specify the specific mechanisms or dimensions of culture that carry its role in learning are in their infancy. The workshop participants defined culture as a term that encompasses economic, ethnic, racial, social structural, and other dimensions that constitute a constellation of influences on children's early learning opportunities. It is critical when examining the research evidence to take careful note of the investigator's definition of culture and its implications for the results from any particular study.

A persistent problem in much of this research is drawing inferences about noneconomic dimensions of culture when, in fact, social class may be the more influential variable. Are differences that are attributed to children's ethnic backgrounds or immigrant status, for example, more accurately ascribed to the educational backgrounds of their parents, as suggested by Laosa? Efforts to disentangle these differing definitions of culture are particularly difficult in the United States, given selective immigration patterns and persistent poverty among African American, Latino, and Native American populations.

Some culturally shaped early learning opportunities have been found to be more conducive than others to preparing children for success in schools, which are typically not designed with diverse configurations of students in mind. One of the challenges that this poses to early childhood educators, in particular, involves striking a balance between demonstrating respect for cultural differences and preparing children to participate successfully in formal school settings (Prince and Lawrence, 1993). A starting point for addressing this dilemma involves understanding how children's cultural backgrounds affect the skills, knowledge, and expectations that they bring to school.

# 3

# What Children Bring to School

Children in the United States are negotiating the transition from home to school at younger ages than was true even a decade ago. Most children's initial exposure to a school-like setting used to occur when they entered kindergarten or first grade; today, preschool environments are the first exposure. As of 1990, 55 percent of low-income children aged three to five were enrolled in a school, child care center, or Head Start program (Brayfield, Deich, and Hofferth, 1993); 40 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds were in some form of group care or preschool program as of 1991 (O'Connell, 1994). From a child's perspective, this requires learning rules of two environments—home and school—at a very early age.

For children whose home language or culture differs substantially from the norm in early childhood classrooms, this transition may expose them to conflicting expectations about how to behave and other potential sources of home-school incompatibility. A child who has been taught that it is disrespectful to ask questions of adults or who is unaccustomed to playing in mixed-sex peer groups, for example, will likely feel some initial discomfort and confusion in classrooms that embody different rules and norms for behavior.

Following the discussion of culturally linked facets of the home environment that affect learning, the workshop participants turned to questions regarding the implications of those facets for what children bring to school and for children's perceptions of school as a familiar or foreign setting. What do children bring with them when they first enter school in the way of

culturally shaped expectations, attitudes, skills, and knowledge? What does research suggest as important sources of compatibility and incompatibility between children's home cultures and those of the early childhood settings that constitute their first exposure to a school-like environment?

Researchers have examined two broad sources of home-school inconsistency that could undermine the ease with which children make the adjustment to early childhood settings. First, children may lack exposure (or sufficient exposure) to the types of preliteracy and prenumeracy experiences that their early childhood teachers expect of them, including exposure to written and spoken English. Second, children may have experienced different social rules that, in turn, affect their expectations about how learning will occur, how their teachers and peers will treat them, and how they should behave in the classroom.

## EXPOSURE TO EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Young children's exposure to the types of learning experiences and materials that schools often expect of them has been repeatedly shown to affect their adjustment to early childhood settings. For example, children who have not acquired some intuitive understanding of the alphabet or of numbers—information that many teachers assume they have—have a higher probability of being left behind when formal instruction begins than do their classmates who have this knowledge. Much of the research discussed in this part of the workshop focused on kindergarten- and early elementary-age students. Although its generalizability to preschool-age children cannot be assumed, some participants speculated that problems associated with children's differing exposure to early learning experiences may actually be exacerbated as formal instruction moves into the preschool years. As noted by one participant, "It simply means that children will get behind even earlier in their educational careers."

### Preliteracy and Prenumeracy Experiences

Evidence that supports the importance of early exposure to particular learning opportunities derives from studies that compare the achievement levels of children who have and have not been exposed to the beneficial early experiences at home or in preschool that were discussed in the previous chapter—conversations about numbers, interactive reading, and decontextualized conversation, for example. Additional evidence, discussed below, derives from intervention studies that provide these experiences and examine subsequent effects on achievement.

The work of Sharon Griffin and her colleagues (Case and Griffin, 1990; Griffin, Case, and Siegler, 1992), for example, has documented striking

differences in the mathematical understandings that low- and middle-income children bring to school. A significant number of low-income children, for example, were unable to tell which of two numbers is bigger or smaller (e.g., 6 or 8) or which number (e.g., 6 or 2) is closer to 5. This is precisely the knowledge on which the solving of first-grade addition and subtraction problems is directly dependent.

What most distinguished the low-income children who could perform these tasks from those who could not was the child's engagement at home (or in preschool) with activities and interactions that associate number with quantity and teach children to think in terms of a mental number line, as described by Resnick (1983). An intervention designed by Griffin and her colleagues to expose kindergartners to these premath experiences at school and thus put them on a par with their more arithmetically sophisticated peers significantly enhanced the children's ability to profit a year later from a standard first-grade arithmetic curriculum.

Home-based efforts to enhance children's exposure to early literacy experiences that predict the successful acquisition of school literacy skills are more common than math-oriented interventions. Two such projects, focused on low-income Latino families, were described at the workshop. Claude Goldenberg and his colleagues designed an intervention aimed at improving the early native-language (i.e., Spanish) literacy attainment of Spanish-speaking children, beginning in kindergarten (Goldenberg, in press). Timothy Shanahan and his colleagues designed Project FLAME (Family Literacy—Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando [Learning, Bettering, Educating]) to enable parents with limited English proficiency to use both Spanish and English to enhance their 3- to 6-year-olds' literacy achievements (Shanahan and Rodriguez-Brown, 1993; Owen and Shanahan, 1993).

Both projects sought to improve children's achievements indirectly through interventions targeted for their parents. In both instances, parents were provided or assisted with choosing age-appropriate books and encouraged to engage in the kinds of reading and other literacy activities that have been found to have a positive influence on children's achievements. Evaluations of both projects have documented significant positive effects on children's literacy development. However, Goldenberg reported that a control group of children who had received very structured, academic instruction in letters, sounds, and how they combine to form words, phrases, and sentences significantly outperformed the children who had received his more informal intervention.

These interventions, whether focused on early math or literacy skills, are based on the assumption that what most distinguishes children who do well from those who do poorly when they enter school is the extent of their exposure to the types of early learning experiences that provide the departure point for formal instruction. Yet, although certain early experiences

appear to be especially advantageous for children's early academic success, Kenji Hakuta noted that "the field lacks a true theory of exposure." There is no basis to suggest specific thresholds regarding, for example, the number of board games or the amount of assisted reading that makes a difference. Existing evidence, as noted by Claude Goldenberg, simply indicates that "the opportunity to learn is related to learning."

### Home Language

Degree of exposure to English language at home is a particularly controversial component of this area of inquiry. Research has not produced a clear set of findings regarding the efficacy of various instructional approaches for language-minority children. It has also only begun to specify the conditions at home, in school, and in the community that influence variation in children's native-language retention and second-language acquisition (Hakuta and D'Andrea, 1992; Pease-Alvarez, Garcia, and Espinosa, 1991; Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta, 1992). The literature that is specific to preschool-age children is particularly thin and inconclusive. Because children younger than 5 years old are still acquiring the basic grammatical and phonological aspects of their first language, generalizing from studies of school-age children to this younger age group must be done with great caution. Snow's research suggesting that students can more readily become literate in a second language once literacy has been established in the home language reinforces the importance of adopting a developmental perspective when interpreting bilingual research (Snow, 1992).

The workshop participants raised several additional cautions about the literature on bilingualism as it pertains to preschoolers. First, although bilingualism is easily attainable in young children, Kenji Hakuta and others noted the substantial influence that a child's home and community language environments, as well as the timing and quality of school-based language instruction, play in the success with which a child's native language is retained and the English language is acquired. Lucinda Pease-Alvarez's work suggests, for example, that retention of Spanish among kindergarten-age children is not disrupted when English is introduced at school, in part because the children she studied are immersed in Spanish at home and in their community. She also observed that these children are adept at figuring out when to use one language rather than the other and at making appropriate adjustments when talking with parents, with various sets of peers, or with teachers.

Second, assessing language proficiency is, itself, a complex undertaking. Some investigators have asked parents to report on their children's native language use (see Fillmore, 1991); others have relied on tests of language proficiency (Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta, 1992). These two out-

come measures assess different aspects of language development. Parents' reports reflect the child's use of language at home: they provide particularly valuable information about parents' perceived ability to communicate with their children and the degree to which children participate in the ethnic language community. In contrast, language assessments are designed to test actual language proficiency, independent of language use in particular settings. It is also important to distinguish between "social" verbal proficiency with friends from proficiency in the more formal school language tasks of writing, reading, or understanding decontextualized texts.

Third, the participants speculated about the influence that the low status sometimes accorded to languages spoken by low-income populations, notably Spanish, might have on children's perceptions and use of their home language. It would not be surprising to find an effect from having one's language ignored or denigrated on children's language use and retention (Moll and Diaz, 1985).

Most of the research discussed at the workshop focused on the maintenance of children's native language, rather than the acquisition of English, as the outcome of primary concern. This focus on language maintenance derived, in part, from the judgment of some participants that concerns about the capacity of non-English-speaking children to acquire English are perhaps *less* warranted than are concerns about their ability to retain the language spoken by their parents at home (Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta, 1992). This is of special concern during the preschool years when, according to research on the developmental course of language development, a child's native language may be particularly fragile to interference. Most evaluations of bilingual education programs, in contrast, focus on student's performance on tests of basic skills and English as the marker of achievement, and neglect measurement of children's native language retention (National Research Council, 1992). As a result, these evaluations are singularly uninformative about the effects of different models of bilingual education on language skills other than the acquisition of English.

## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LEARNING

The learning opportunities that children encounter during their preschool years transmit not only knowledge and skills, but also more subtle information about *how* knowledge is acquired and communicated. These processes of learning, which affect children's accustomed ways of receiving and absorbing new information, transpire in a distinctly social context. The workshop participants discussed the available evidence regarding cultural influences on the social conventions and assumptions that guide learning.

Research on the social dimensions of learning support the proposition that the degree of congruence between the interactions that guide learning

interactions at home and those that guide instruction at school can affect young children's adjustment and comfort in early childhood settings. Children who are unaware of conventions about whether and when students should participate in the classroom, for example, appear more likely to retreat from active involvement or to become disruptive in the face of confusion. However, whether children's learning is directly affected by these types of incompatibility has not been adequately addressed by research. The empirical literature that addresses these issues is, again, largely restricted to elementary-age children; its generalizability to younger children is unknown. The workshop participants focused their discussion on three aspects of this literature that have received the bulk of empirical attention: approaches to learning, the social organization of classrooms, and conventions of conversation and participation.

### Approaches to Learning

The pioneering work of Heath (1983) and Tharp (1989) was credited with identifying the powerful role that culturally shaped patterns of transmitting knowledge have on the ways in which children learn to learn. Tharp's work with Native Americans, for example, has revealed a preference for nonlinear ways of transmitting information, in which a central theme is first described and then elaborated using circular-patterned visual displays (Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp, 1987). This approach contrasts with methods of teaching that move in a linear progression from derivative pieces of information to a central theme or conclusion.

Barbara Rogoff and Patricia Greenfield, both of whom have worked with a mix of cultural groups within and outside the United States, noted the varying degree to which observational learning, as opposed to explicit teaching through verbal instructions, is relied on in different cultural contexts. Greenfield emphasized the different goals that guide learning in different cultural contexts. Learning to drive or to weave, for example, appears to be most appropriately learned through observational processes in which a student repeatedly witnesses the complete task and then gradually participates in stepwise fashion. In these cases, precision is important, and conservative means of learning are valued. Alternatively, tasks for which experimentation is adaptive and generalization to different versions of the task is sought (such as painting, reading, and writing), may be better taught through more experimental, trial-and-error methods. Rogoff added that preferences for interdependent patterns of learning in which cooperation is highly valued versus independent approaches that stress individual accomplishment are also more or less adaptive in different cultural contexts.

To the extent that children grow accustomed to certain ways of acquiring information at home and in their communities that differ from the ap-

proaches used at school, they may be relatively unprepared to learn new information easily and readily from their teachers. This is not to say that some children learn less well or in less-advanced or less-organized ways. Indeed, although some cultures may value certain modes of learning over others, the workshop participants stressed that there is no evidence to suggest that children are constrained by culture in their ability to adjust to a wide range of instructional styles.

### Social Organization

Social organization refers to the structures in which teaching, learning, and performance occur. This includes the size and composition of the groups in which children are clustered for various activities, the ways in which children demonstrate what they have learned, and the degree of independent or assisted learning that is expected of them. Research with Hawaiian families, for example, in which children are often cared for by their siblings has shown that the children are accustomed to learning in the context of frequent peer interaction (Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan, 1974). Classrooms that emphasized independent learning and teacher-student exchanges were found to constitute alien environments for these children. When classrooms were restructured to be more compatible with these children's familiar peer-group dynamics (e.g., children working in small, mixed-sex groups in learning centers, with indirect teacher supervision), disruptive and inattentive behaviors were substantially reduced (Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan, 1974; Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp, 1987; Weisner, Gallimore and Jordan, 1989).

An interesting extension of this research involved an attempt to adopt the lessons learned with Hawaiian children to classrooms of Navajo children (Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp, 1987). In Navajo culture, peer groups are less prevalent and tend to be sex specific: In order to create an effective classroom organization for these children, the small groups were reduced to 2-3 children of all the same sex, and a greater emphasis was placed on individual assignments. These Navajo children functioned best when they were allowed to work independently—observing, listening, and practicing skills on their own as they do in their communities. Philips' (1972) ethnographic work with another Native American community pointed to the role of social rules governing classroom performance. Her sample of children performed best when they were allowed to practice in private and determine when they were ready to show an audience what they had learned. This stands in contrast to the more common practice of teacher-determined patterns of student performance.

### Conventions of Conversation and Participation

Children bring to school expectations about appropriate language use based on their experiences at home. Culturally shaped conventions of conversation that have been studied include wait time, the pace and call-response patterns that characterize conversations, and participation structures (Heath, 1983). The use of pauses in between questions and responses, for example, appears to be somewhat culture specific. Pueblo Indian children have been observed to provide more elaborated responses and to participate spontaneously to a greater extent when wait-time is extended (Winterton, 1977). Native Hawaiian students, in contrast, are accustomed to overlapping speech, which is interpreted as demonstrating interest and involvement; long wait-times tend to inhibit their participation in instructional activities (White and Tharp, 1988). Hale-Benson's research on culturally based speech rhythms has identified a "contest" style of speech—named call-and-response speech after the patterns found in black music—in which black mothers and children volley comments rhythmically back and forth (Hale-Benson, 1990).

Children also acquire accustomed ways of entering into conversations and participating in group activities (Heath, 1983). Claude Goldenberg described his experience with Latino children, whose mothers tend to use highly directive patterns of communication. As a result, these children might expect to be cued to participate in classroom discussions. Goldenberg observed that extending wait-time, absent cuing, had no effect on some of these children's participation; explicit cuing, on the other hand, enhanced both cued and spontaneous participation.

The context in which children are most comfortable talking in groups also appears somewhat culture bound. The convention called "talk-story"—in which adults co-narrate a story, with frequent overlapping speech and references to shared experiences—is common among Hawaiian adults. Classroom practices with young Hawaiian students that were explicitly designed to mimic this narrative pattern led to more spontaneous and animated classroom participation (Au, 1980; Au and Mason, 1981). Among Navajo children, in contrast, a discussion pattern that allowed each student to speak for longer periods in a discursive manner that circles around the main point, with other students waiting their turn, was most effective.

## EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Research that examines these socially based sources of home-school incompatibility is often premised on the assumption that children will be adversely affected when school is not like home. Indeed, some attribute the lack of school success experienced by many low-income and minority stu-

dents to their preference for forms of interaction, language, and thought that conflict with those that are promoted by and perhaps needed for success in school. Others, however, caution that a strong emphasis on promoting cultural compatibility between school and home may do a disservice to children who need to learn the mainstream patterns of discourse they will encounter as they advance through school (Delpit, 1988). There are scant data to inform these critically important questions. To the extent that a research base exists, it has focused on children's classroom participation rather than on assessments of learning (see Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1989).

The available evidence indicates that children's dispositions to participate in classroom activities are affected by the degree of compatibility that they experience between their home and school cultures. Adjusting pause time, cuing children to participate, organizing small groups to match children's home experiences, and other practices aimed at increasing home-school compatibility appear to facilitate children's engagement in learning. However, the effects of cultural accommodations on student learning and achievement have yet to be demonstrated. As noted by Goldenberg: "With the exception of some studies of cooperative learning and of bilingual education, the experimental evidence linking culturally compatible instruction and scholastic outcomes is very tenuous." Certainly, high levels of comfort and engagement may be very desirable goals in their own right. Few would argue that children need to feel accepted by their teachers and classmates and that cultural factors are pertinent to assuring that this occurs. Nevertheless, the link to improved academic achievement, while plausible, has not been shown. This lack of evidence is due, in part, to concerns about the validity of prevailing achievement tests for children from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, many of the scientists who study these children believe in the value of expanding conceptions of achievement beyond performance on achievement tests.

## SUMMARY

Available evidence indicates that children who come to school without exposure to the types of learning opportunities that many teachers take for granted may be at a disadvantage in comparison with children whose preschool experiences accord with teachers' assumptions. Efforts to "catch children up" through various prenumeracy and preliteracy interventions appear to have positive effects on subsequent achievement. Efforts to address more qualitative aspects of home-school incompatibility that arise from differences in the social rules, expectations, and conventions of conversations that characterize a child's home and school environments may also be warranted for purposes of encouraging children's engagement in the classroom.

The jury is still out, however, with respect to the effects of these cultural accommodations on short- or long-term learning.

It is evident, moreover, that notions of "incompatibility" require substantial refinement. Under some circumstances, consistency across home and school environments may not be desirable. Some degree of complementarity may be desirable and may even be sought deliberately by parents. Some parents, for example, seek out preschool settings that will expose their children to educational experiences, including English instruction, that they know they cannot provide at home. From children's standpoints, the process of adjusting to different practices at home and at school may even be beneficial, particularly in a multicultural society such as ours. As Stipek noted: "The goal is not necessarily to either get parents to do what is happening in schools or to get schools to adapt to what is happening in the home, but to look at how these two contexts in which children learn can complement and reinforce each other. It does not necessarily mean they have to be the same; sometimes there is value in different approaches."

# 4

# Implications for Early Education

Preschool is no longer seen simply as a place where children play and have fun with their age-mates. Concerns about the educational attainment of the country's children have refocused attention on early childhood settings as places where children also get ready for school. For those concerned with the issues presented by an increasingly diverse student population, preschool education has become a focal point of differing views about how best to accommodate the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in American society and to prepare children from diverse backgrounds for school success (Jipson, 1991). Opinions range from those who advocate acculturation to mainstream educational materials and practices, including immersion in English language, to those who support instructional approaches that have as a primary objective the maintenance of children's home culture and language.

The workshop participants considered the practical implications of existing knowledge about cultural influences on early learning. In general, they were extremely cautious about taking the step from research to practice. As stated by David Dickinson: "Any suggestions that we have obvious connections to practice need to be heavily laden with caveats." With this in mind, the participants framed a set of issues that they believed could contribute to a more informed discussion of the early education of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

## GOALS OF EARLY EDUCATION

The workshop participants noted that any attempt to decipher educational implications from the existing literature must proceed from a discussion of the range of educational goals that a particular group or community wants to accomplish. Implicit in the current debate about diversity and early education are differing perceptions of the goals of early education. The goal of assimilation would suggest different practices than would the goal of preserving children's native cultures. On the topic of language, for example, different practices might be suggested if the primary goal is one of children's learning English or retaining the home language. Alternatively, efforts aimed at supporting the successful and harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures would support yet other practices, such as bi- or multilingual classrooms.

The participants also distinguished between educational practices that have a long-term aim of socializing children to "do things in the school's way" and those that are designed to preserve the diversity of cultural orientations that children bring to the classroom. Patricia Greenfield characterized this distinction in terms of instruction that is designed to "wean children to the majority culture" and that which is designed to promote a "true intercultural exchange." For example, teachers who instruct all children in English or who rely on Spanish instruction primarily as a means of bridging the transition to all-English instruction are viewed as promoting the primacy of the dominant culture and language. An alternative approach would involve encouraging all children to acquire two languages.

Since the selection of goals is driven primarily by values, one cannot argue that some goals are better supported by research than others. Rather, participants noted, it is important to remember that nonempirical considerations are essential to understanding the ways in which research is interpreted and used to help select among different educational practices and policies. Luis Laosa noted that decisions about the general orientation that a particular school adopts involve consideration of the environments that children will face after preschool. The issue for research is not whether one goal—acculturation, intercultural exchange, or preservation of distinct cultures—is superior; the empirical challenge is one of identifying the most effective means of moving children towards the goal that is chosen by their community. If the goal is English proficiency, for example, questions remain about how best to accomplish this. Some claim that better fluency in a child's first language facilitates English proficiency; others advocate rapid immersion in English. While a fair amount is known about successful bilingual programs in certain contexts, including immersion programs in Canada and bilingual maintenance programs in some U.S. settings, there is much to be learned about the conditions that need to be present to ensure

the successful exportation of these programs to new contexts. Factors ranging from children's linguistic environments at home to school resources that facilitate bilingualism warrant careful consideration.

## HOW TEACHERS VIEW THEIR ROLE

There is another set of issues regarding how teachers can be most effective when their students represent a range of cultural backgrounds and languages. Participants believed that the available research, though sparse, has some implications for how teachers approach their role when instructing children whose cultural backgrounds do not match their own. A useful first step might involve asking teachers what they want to know about the children they are now teaching and what they find hard about teaching in classrooms characterized by diversity.

We noted above a range of ways in which children from nonmajority cultural backgrounds may arrive at the school door relatively ill-equipped to feel comfortable and competent and to demonstrate what they know in ways that their teachers will understand. The disparity between their early experiences and the classroom environment is likely to be even more apparent when they are in classrooms with children from homes that share the values, language, and expectations of their teachers. At the same time, teachers in such mixed classrooms are constantly confronted with behavioral variations that affect their ability to manage and to teach. The challenge they face is one of appreciating differences in how children are accustomed to learning and of figuring out whether, when, and how to adjust to these differences. Should they, for example, interpret a quiet child's behavior as an indication of withdrawal or as a culturally shaped means of showing respect? Regardless of the interpretation, should attempts be made to draw this child out? If so, how, and what are the ramifications of the choice?

Given the range of possibilities that emerge in response to these types of questions, teachers who are well-equipped to gather information about children's cultural backgrounds and to apply this information to their own teaching practices may be in a better position to support children's motivation and learning in school than are their colleagues who are unable or unwilling to take cultural variation into account as they plan their instructional approaches. The workshop participants called on Schon's (1987) concept of the "reflective practitioner" to capture this information-gathering, experimental attitude towards the education of linguistically and culturally diverse children. They also noted, however, that teachers are generally neither encouraged nor taught to view themselves as reflective practitioners. Rather than being trained to work with a range of instructional tools and to make decisions about how best to adapt their strategies to different class-

room situations, teacher training is often highly prescriptive and devoid of culture and context.

More effective training might focus on preparing teachers with a rich set of hypotheses about potential sources of home-school incompatibility and with skills that would better equip them to make use of this knowledge in their own classroom situations. Teachers could be encouraged, for example, to watch for behavioral indicators that a child is feeling uncomfortable and to understand the role that culture may play in generating that feeling. Effective means of involving parents and other relatives in the classroom could facilitate teachers' ability to interpret the rules and assumptions that are governing their students' behavior. Guidance to teachers in their efforts to help children negotiate differences between how things are done at home and how they are done at school could also be very beneficial (see Williams, 1991).

These aspects of working with children from diverse backgrounds are both very important and very demanding for teachers. Deborah Stipek concluded: "At best, what this research can do for any particular preschool teacher in any particular school, is point them to a set of hypotheses about their children that they need to assess in their own local situation." But, she noted: "We still can't tell them precisely what to do about it."

## EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

In considering what is known about instructional practices that are appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse groups of children, the workshop participants speculated that effective instruction for these children does not differ from that which is considered effective instruction for all children. Sharon Griffin summarized five principles of instruction that have emerged from research in cognitive science: (1) knowledge is constructed, (2) through active participation, (3) in a social context, (4) in which forms of communication developed in the culture are encouraged and available, and (5) used to establish a community of learners. Practices that support these principles include small- group instruction, ample opportunities for children to participate and work directly with materials, and tasks that enable children to discover new ideas and concepts in the process of working with materials.

The flexibility in instructional practices that these principles suggest—offering multiple ways for children to demonstrate their learning, to participate in classroom activities, and to work interactively with adults and other children—may be particularly conducive to teaching diverse groups of students. In effect, they build into the curriculum many opportunities for children to adapt activities and tasks to their accustomed ways of acquiring and demonstrating new knowledge.

Sharon Griffin explained further that she designs her curriculum to promote "equal participation." To achieve this, her intervention offers children wide latitude in how they choose to engage in learning activities. Some may need to observe others for a while before they are comfortable joining in; others may want to practice with the teacher before they begin to work with their classmates; others may be most comfortable working in collaboration with peers from start to finish.

David Dickinson highlighted the importance of classrooms that provide rich language experiences. Opportunities for children to engage with teachers in conversations that expose them to varied vocabulary, encourage them to answer questions and offer explanations, and to speculate about causes for behavior or incidents, are related to later story understanding and vocabulary (Dickinson and Smith, 1994).

The instructional value of small-group activities (the precise size and composition of which will vary) that encourage children to cooperate in their efforts to understand and master new material was noted by several workshop participants. This approach seems to work best when children collaborate on a single task, such as a common journal or a group science project, rather than on individual tasks. Dickinson reported, as well, that the types of conversations that are conducive to language development appear to occur more frequently in small groups.

Activities that encourage children to work directly with learning materials, in hands-on fashion, provide them with maneuvering room for tailoring a task to their own styles and pace of learning. Science and social studies units on dinosaurs or planets, for example, can be used to engage children in writing stories, generating reasons for past or future events, and acquiring concepts of relative size and shape. Science themes have also been used recently in studies of bilingual teaching with school-age children. Early results of this work suggest that bilingual teaching of science fosters the acquisition of both scientific knowledge and a second language.

## THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Parents, as well as teachers, feel the impact of disparities between home and classroom environments. They encounter tensions between what schools expect and do and their own practices at home, both indirectly through messages that their children bring home and directly through their own interactions with teachers and other school personnel. Parents' perspectives on home-school incompatibility have received even less attention than those of teachers. Available evidence is largely anecdotal and typically collected in conjunction with parent-focused intervention efforts.

Several of the workshop participants who had worked directly with non-Anglo parents spoke about the powerful influence that parents' beliefs

about how children learn, and their understandings about the respective responsibilities of parents and teachers, have on the learning opportunities the parents provide at home. Many of these parents do not regard themselves as having a role as a teacher of reading, writing, and math in any traditional sense of the term, particularly during the preschool years. This appears to be true of poorly educated parents, in general, rather than being a function of any particular cultural group (Laosa, 1978, 1990).

Tim Shanahan and Claude Goldenberg—each of whom has worked closely with parents—emphasized the powerful influence that parents' perceptions of their roles had on the effectiveness of the investigators' efforts to encourage preliteracy interactions in the home. Reflecting on their experience, they noted that interventions should be mindful of parents' theories and views of how learning takes place. They also were struck by the influence that children's classroom experiences had on parents. Materials that children and their siblings brought home, often in the form of homework assignments, informed parents about their children's capabilities and engaged them in forms of interaction that they would have been unlikely to initiate on their own.

Issues associated with language differences between home and school are a particularly controversial topic of inquiry that, again, has largely ignored the parents' point of view. Research on bilingual education, for example, has focused on children's language outcomes to the neglect of effects on children's relations with their parents. Workshop participants raised concerns about the possible threat posed to non-English-speaking parents when their child's school entry coincides with immersion in English. These parents may experience two levels of loss, one associated with the children's departure from home and the other associated with fears that their ability to communicate with their children will be compromised. Several workshop participants reported that these parents worry tremendously that their influence over their children will be diminished as they enter a relatively alien environment and learn an unfamiliar language.

In contrast, Lucinda Pease-Alvarez reported that the Mexican immigrant parents in her research welcomed the school's efforts to teach their children English. Although they appreciated the fact that Spanish was used when their children first entered kindergarten, they wanted it to be replaced quickly with English instruction. At the same time, these parents were very committed to the maintenance of their children's Spanish. They saw this as their role, however, and that of the teacher as one of teaching English.

Parents were also discussed as critical informants in teachers' efforts to interpret their students' classroom behaviors. Efforts aimed at reducing linguistic and cultural impediments to parents' involvement in their children's early education settings were widely applauded. Those familiar with such efforts reported that parents typically respond very positively to efforts to

include them. When attempts at inclusion are not considered relevant to education, awkward encounters between parents and schools can occur. Patricia Greenfield described the experience of a Mexican American family that, as a group, accompanied one of their children to the first day of school. The teacher greeted their arrival by stating, "Oh, another spoiled child," altogether missing the expression of family unity and celebration of the child's entry into school that this behavior signified.

## SUMMARY

The empirical base supporting the efficacy of adjusting classroom practices so that they are more compatible with children's cultural backgrounds is relatively thin. In contrast, the vast literature documenting sound educational practices for young children *in general* would appear to be very well-suited to instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse groups of youngsters. These best practices typically include substantial opportunities for tailoring classroom practices to children's individual styles and approaches to learning. The workshop participants explicitly cautioned against losing sight of these universal educational practices in the search for culturally compatible instructional methods.

# 5

# Directions for Research

Although both theory and research on learning and instruction have advanced in recent years, only a small share of this work specifically addresses the educational needs of the increasingly diverse student population in the United States. To the extent that a relevant research literature exists, it has tended to examine children in elementary or secondary school, to the neglect of the growing share of children whose first experience with school occurs at 3 or 4 years of age. Given the magnitude of the demographic changes in the composition of preschool and school-age children, it is remarkable how tenuous is the understanding of the myriad of issues that bear on their educational success. Many suggestions for research have been made throughout this report; in this concluding section, those that were noted repeatedly at the workshop are highlighted, along with other important topics not previously mentioned.

## CHILDREN AS CULTURAL BROKERS

Children whose home backgrounds do not correspond to the norms, expectations, and language of their schools negotiate two (or more) cultures on a daily basis. In effect, they serve as cultural brokers and translators for their family, their neighbors, and their teachers and classmates. Only rarely, however, are children studied in more than one context. The field lacks a framework for considering factors that predict successful adaptation on behalf of these children, and even for defining "successful" in this context. What characteristics and skills distinguish children who enjoy and fulfill

this role effectively? What supports in children's communities and schools facilitate their efforts to move between their home and school environments? Is successful adaptation gained at a cost to children's identity development or to their relations with their families? Is there a set of brokering skills that benefit children in ways that extend beyond their experiences in negotiating between home and school?

## BILINGUAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Language instruction is among the most politically sensitive facets of educating children from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual education is typically associated with controversial issues, such as U.S. language policy regarding the official status of English and policies regarding access of immigrant families to public education and other services (August and Garcia, 1993; Hakuta, 1986). This context serves to underscore the critical importance of having a solid knowledge base as input to policy discussions about language- minority children.

There is no dearth of researchable issues regarding bilingual education. Three were prominent among the workshop discussions. First, there is virtually no research available to guide decisions that are being made regarding the treatment of language-minority children in the context of education reform. Pressing issues range from effective means of ensuring language-minority students access to high-quality curriculum content to identifying valid assessment methods for these students.

Second, there is a set of unanswered questions regarding the relationship between a child's home language and English acquisition: When and how should English be introduced? Should instruction in the native language be phased out once children can benefit from English instruction? What adjustments need to be made regarding instructional language for bilingual special education?

Third, it is important to place research on language in the context of children's lives at home and at school. For example, very little is known about the conditions in homes, in schools, and in communities that influence variation in language acquisition and retention. Similarly, effective language instruction cannot occur in isolation from other aspects of an instructional program, yet questions regarding school and classroom environments that facilitate and sustain successful educational outcomes for language-minority students have not been addressed by research.

## EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

The workshop drew into sharp focus the dearth of research that is available to inform teachers' efforts to provide effective instruction in the con-

text of cultural diversity. Some dimensions of effective instruction that warrant careful research are the following:

- Minimal attention has been paid to school- and district-level factors that facilitate effective instruction in prekindergarten programs for ethnic and language-minority children.
- Early work on the use of math, science, and social studies curricula as an avenue for literacy development points to a particularly intriguing topic for future study with preschool populations.
- Models of teacher training designed to promote the experimental approach to instruction that is captured by the term "reflective practitioner" are sorely needed.
- Effective means of incorporating parents into their young children's early school experiences also warrant careful study. An appropriate starting point would involve understanding, from parents' perspectives, different ways in which parents feel comfortable relating to teachers and other school personnel.

## NONMINORITY CHILDREN AS BENEFICIARIES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Virtually all of the research on the role of cultural diversity in education has focused on children from minority ethnic and language groups. The ramifications of various educational approaches tend to be examined only for these children, to the neglect of their classmates from the majority culture. Yet the diversity of the U.S. population, along with the globalization of economic and geopolitical activity, suggests that *all* children could benefit from exposure to multilingual and multicultural learning environments. Diverse classrooms afford the opportunity for all students to acquire an expanded repertoire of languages, skills, and capacities to function effectively as citizens in a multicultural society and as workers in a global economy. Examination of the interpersonal and scholastic effects on nonminority students of attending culturally mixed schools, of exposure to dual-language instruction, and of learning cooperatively with children who acquire and express their knowledge in differing ways is a very promising direction for research.

## SAMPLING STRATEGIES FOR STUDYING CULTURE AND SOCIAL CLASS

The most long-standing methodological challenge to research on cultural differences in the United States is that of devising sampling strategies that offer greater social-class variability among the cultural groups being

studied. This is especially difficult because of the confounding of class and ethnicity among American Indian, African American and many immigrant Latino groups. At a minimum, researchers need to specify which aspect of culture is being targeted for study. Additionally, efforts to specify how selective migration patterns might affect the patterns of behavior observed in the United States and to combine observational research in the United States with research on similar populations in their country of origin (see Landale, 1994) warrant serious exploration.

Luis Laosa noted further that only some groups and some mixes of students have been studied. Of particular importance for future research, given demographic trends in urban areas, is research on classrooms that contain multiple ethnic, immigrant, and linguistic groups. The study of multi-ethnic groups holds the potential to refine understanding of the variability that has been documented within culturally defined groups and to determine both generalities and specifics that are relevant to schooling.

## THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Although the workshop focused on educational issues, several participants called attention to the role that violence has played in the lives of many immigrant and other ethnic minority children. They emphasized the importance of dealing with the stress that many of these children and their parents experience as an integral aspect of helping them adjust to early childhood settings. Barbara Rogoff, for example, has worked with Guatemalan children who have witnessed the torture and killing of family members.

To illustrate the powerful impact that urban violence in the United States can have on young children's ability to concentrate in school, Delia Pompa described the tensions that children feel between the schoolroom focus on learning to read and the neighborhood pressure to learn how to avoid antagonizing gang members. These experiences undoubtedly have a profound effect on young children's ability to engage in the new cultural environments that schools present to them, as well as on the anxiety that parents experience when they send their children to the neighborhood schools. Many children who are studied in the context of research on cultural diversity are actually adjusting to two cultures: that of urban communities and that of their preschool programs. The next generation of research needs to cast a broader net in order to capture the full extent of adjustment that these children are experiencing and to examine the undoubtedly intricate ways in which the different environments that children inhabit at home, at school, and in their communities (past and current) influence each other.

## RESEARCH CAPACITY

The workshop suggestions for research are intended to direct scholars toward issues that hold the potential to advance current debates about the early education of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For this to occur, however, consideration needs to be given to identifying mechanisms that will promote more effective exchanges between scholars and practitioners in the development and application of research. Appropriate roles for federal agencies (both program and research agencies), foundations, and academic institutions require careful thought and coordination. Effective means are also needed to recruit and retain both junior and senior scholars from multiple disciplines and a range of ethnic groups who are motivated to address these research questions. Without attention to these issues of research capacity, it is unlikely that the country will be in any better position in 10 years than it is today to guide sound early educational policy for an increasingly diverse society.

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